AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS:

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions and listings of claims in the application:

1. (Currently Amended) A method, implemented using a computer system, of managing delivery carriers, comprising

receiving delivery data from mail processors;

determining, using the computer system, routes for delivery using the delivery data and a set of business rules;

assigning, using the computer system, mail items to delivery carriers based on the determined routes;

measuring the performance of the delivery carriers;

transmitting, using the computer system, mail item assignment information to the mail processors;

monitoring, ~~in real time, mail delivery on~~ the determined routes after the mail items are assigned, wherein ~~real time~~ monitoring ~~the mail delivery~~ includes:

receiving ~~real time~~ update information from the delivery carriers while the mail items are being delivered on the [[pre]]determined routes, wherein the ~~real time~~ update information relates to at least one of the routes for delivery and a capacity of the delivery carriers; and

dynamically reassigning the mail items to different delivery carriers based on the ~~real time~~ update information received from the delivery carriers during ~~real time~~ monitoring ~~the mail delivery~~.

2.   (Original)   The method of claim 1, wherein determining routes includes processing active, planned, and closed routes.

3.   (Original)   The method of claim 1, wherein determining routes using the business rules includes using cost consideration information.

4.   (Original)   The method of claim 3, wherein using cost consideration information further includes using information regarding contractual obligations to the delivery carriers.

5.   (Original)   The method of claim 4, wherein using cost consideration information further includes determining a lowest cost for service window.

6.   (Original)   The method of claim 3, wherein using cost considerations includes using delivery option information.

7.   (Original)   The method of claim 6, wherein using delivery option information further includes evaluating data regarding at least one of aircraft, trains, motor vehicles, and ships as a means of transporting the mail items.

8.   (Original)   The method of claim 3, wherein using business rules further includes using route delay information.

9.   (Original)   The method of claim 8, wherein using route delay information further includes receiving weather information.

10.   (Original)   The method of claim 8, wherein using route delay information further includes receiving route closing information from the delivery carriers.

11.   (Original)   The method of claim 1, further comprising creating an assignment manifest.

12.   (Original)   The method of claim 11, wherein creating the assignment manifest includes generating one of a hardcopy and an electronic copy of the assignment manifest.

13.   (Original)   The method of claim 12, further comprising transmitting the assignment manifest to at least one delivery carrier.

14.   (Original)   The method of claim 1, further comprising tracking deliveries of the mail items using performance management tools.

15.   (Currently Amended)   A system for managing delivery carriers, comprising:

   means for receiving delivery data from mail processors;

   means for determining routes for delivery using the delivery data and a set of business rules;

   means for assigning mail items to delivery carriers based on the determined routes;

   means for measuring the performance of the delivery carriers;

   means for transmitting mail item assignment information to the mail processors;

means for monitoring, ~~in real time, mail delivery on~~ the determined routes after the mail items are assigned, wherein ~~real-time~~ monitoring ~~the mail delivery~~ includes:

receiving ~~real-time~~ update information from the delivery carriers while the mail items are being delivered on the [[pre]]determined routes, wherein the ~~real-time~~ update information relates to at least one of the routes for delivery and a capacity of the delivery carriers; and

means for dynamically reassigning the mail items to different delivery carriers based on the ~~real-time~~ update information received from the delivery carriers during ~~real-time~~ monitoring ~~the mail delivery~~.

16. (Original)   The system of claim 15, wherein the means for determining routes includes means for processing active, planned, and closed routes.

17. (Original)   The system of claim 15, wherein the means for determining routes using the business rules includes means for using cost consideration information.

18. (Original)   The system of claim 17, wherein the means for using cost consideration information further includes means for using information regarding contractual obligations to the delivery carriers.

19. (Original)   The system of claim 18, wherein the means for using cost consideration information further includes means for determining a lowest cost for service window.

20. (Previously Presented)   The system of claim 17, wherein the means for using cost consideration information includes means for using delivery option information.

21. (Original)   The system of claim 20, wherein the means for using delivery option information further includes means for evaluating data regarding at least one of aircraft, trains, motor vehicles, and ships for transporting the mail items.

22. (Original)   The system of claim 17, wherein the means for determining routes using the business rules further includes means for using route delay information.

23. (Original)   The system of claim 22, wherein the means for using route delay information further includes means for receiving weather information.

24. (Original)   The system of claim 22, wherein the means for using route delay information further includes means for receiving route closing information from the delivery carriers.

25. (Original)   The system of claim 15, further comprising means for creating an assignment manifest.

26. (Original)   The system of claim 25, wherein the means for creating the assignment manifest includes means for generating one of a hardcopy and an electronic copy of the assignment manifest.

27. (Original)   The system of claim 26, further comprising means for transmitting the assignment manifest to at least one delivery carrier.

28.   (Original)   The system of claim 15, further comprising means for tracking deliveries of the mail items.

29.   (Currently Amended)   A solid computer-readable medium having computer-executable instructions for performing stages, comprising:

    receiving delivery data from mail processors;

    determining routes for delivery using the delivery data and a set of business rules;

    assigning mail items to delivery carriers based on the determined routes;

    measuring the performance of the delivery carriers;

    transmitting mail item assignment information to the mail processors;

    monitoring, in real time, mail delivery on the determined routes after the mail items are assigned, wherein real time monitoring the mail delivery includes:

        receiving real time update information from the delivery carriers while the mail items are being delivered on the [[pre]]determined routes, wherein the real time update information relates to at least one of the routes for delivery and a capacity of the delivery carriers; and

    dynamically reassigning the mail items to different delivery carriers based on the real time update information received from the delivery carriers during real time monitoring the mail delivery.

30.   (Original)   The computer-readable medium of claim 29, wherein determining routes includes processing active, planned, and closed routes.

31.   (Original)   The computer-readable medium of claim 29, wherein determining routes using the business rules includes using cost consideration information.

32.   (Original)   The computer-readable medium of claim 31, wherein using cost consideration information further includes using carrier contract information.

33.   (Original)   The computer-readable medium of claim 32, wherein using cost consideration information further includes determining a lowest cost for service window.

34.   (Original)   The computer-readable medium of claim 31, wherein using cost consideration information includes using delivery option information.

35.   (Original)   The computer-readable medium of claim 34, wherein using delivery option information further includes evaluating data regarding at least one of aircraft, trains, motor vehicles, and ships as a means of transporting the mail items.

36.   (Original)   The computer-readable medium of claim 31, wherein using the business rules further includes using route delay information.

37.   (Original)   The computer-readable medium of claim 36, wherein using route delay information further includes receiving weather information.

38.   (Original)   The computer-readable medium of claim 36, wherein using route delay information further includes receiving route closing information from the delivery carriers.

39.   (Original)   The computer-readable medium of claim 29, further comprising computer-executable instructions for creating an assignment manifest.

40.   (Original)   The computer-readable medium of claim 39, wherein creating the assignment manifest includes generating one of a hardcopy and an electronic copy of the assignment manifest.

41.   (Original)   The computer-readable medium of claim 40, further comprising computer-executable instructions for transmitting the assignment manifest to at least one delivery carrier.

42.   (Original)   The computer-readable medium of claim 29, further comprising computer-executable instructions for tracking deliveries of the mail items.

43.   (Currently Amended)   A system for managing delivery carriers, comprising:

    at least one server containing a mail assignment engine, the mail assignment engine operative to:

        receive delivery data from mail processors;

        determine routes for delivery using the delivery data and a set of business rules;

        assign mail items to carriers based on the determined routes;

        receive performance measurements of carriers;

        transmit mail item assignment information to the mail processors;

monitor, in real time, mail delivery on the determined routes

after the mail items are assigned, wherein real time

monitoring mail delivery includes:

receiving real time update information from the

delivery carriers while the mail items are being

delivered on the predetermined routes, wherein

the real time update information relates to at

least one of the routes for delivery and a

capacity of the delivery carriers; and

dynamically reassign the mail items to different delivery

carriers based on the real time update information

received from the delivery carriers during real time

monitoring the mail delivery.

44.　(Original)　The system of claim 43, wherein a transaction concentrator is used to manage communications for the at least one server.

45.　(Original)　The system of claim 43, wherein the mail assignment engine determines the routes using a database including files for active, planned, and closed routes.

46.　(Original)　The system of claim 43, wherein the mail assignment engine determines the routes using business rules including cost consideration information.

47.　(Original)　The system of claim 46, wherein the cost consideration information further includes carrier contract information.

48. (Original)   The system of claim 46, wherein the cost considerations further includes a lowest cost for service window.

49. (Original)   The system of claim 46, wherein the cost considerations further include delivery option information.

50. (Original)   The system of claim 49, wherein the delivery option information further includes information for evaluating data regarding at least one of aircraft, trains, motor vehicles, and ships.

51. (Original)   The system of claim 46, wherein the business rules further include route delay information.

52. (Original)   The system of claim 51, wherein the route delay information further includes weather information.

53. (Original)   The system of claim 51, wherein the route delay information further includes route closing information received from the delivery carriers.

54. (Original)   The system of claim 43, wherein the mail assignment engine is further operative to create an assignment manifest.

55. (Original)   The system of claim 54, wherein the assignment manifest is one of a hardcopy and an electronic file for delivery to at least one of the delivery carriers.

56. (Previously Presented)   The system of claim 43, further comprising performance management tools for tracking deliveries of the mail items.

57. (Currently Amended)   A computer for tagging mail items and for executing a software component, the software component including computer-executable instructions for:

    receiving delivery data;

    transmitting delivery data to a mail item assignment system;

    receiving an assignment data file containing information regarding assignment of mail items from the mail item assignment system after the mail item assignment system assigns the mail items to a delivery carrier and an associated delivery route;

    receiving information indicating reassignment of the mail items after the mail item assignment system dynamically reassigns the mail items to a different delivery carrier based on ~~real-time~~ monitoring ~~mail delivery~~ the delivery route after the mail items are assigned to the delivery route, wherein ~~real-time~~ monitoring includes receiving ~~real-time~~ update information from the previously assigned delivery carrier while the mail items are being delivered on the assigned delivery route, the ~~real-time~~ update information including information concerning at least one of a previously assigned delivery route and a capacity of the previously assigned delivery carrier; and

    printing labels containing mail item routing information.

58. (Previously Presented)   The method of claim 1, further comprising adjusting at least one business rule of the set of business rules based on the measured performance information.

59. (Previously Presented)   The system of claim 15, further comprising means for adjusting at least one business rule of the set of business rules based on the measured performance information.

60. (Previously Presented)   The computer-readable medium of claim 29, further comprising instructions for performing a stage comprising adjusting at least one business rule of the set of business rules based on the measured performance information.

61. (Previously Presented)   The system of claim 43, wherein the mail assignment engine is operative to adjust at least one business rule of the set of business rules based on the measured performance information.